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Ladies and Gentlemen Follow Me, Please Put On Your Beards: Risk, Rules, and Audience Reception in National Theatre Wales

Kirsty Sedgman

Abstract:

Through their 'Theatre Map of Wales', launched in 2009 and running between 2010-11, National Theatre Wales developed a reputation for theatrical innovation. In their first season the company worked in a series of locations throughout Wales, producing thirteen shows, one per month, many incorporating mobile elements. By reading across responses to five of these National Theatre Wales productions – *Shelf Life* (Swansea), *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* (Barmouth), *The Weather Factory* (Penygroes), *Outdoors* (Aberystwyth), and *The Passion* (Port Talbot) – I address the extent to which affording audiences greater agency over their mobility might lead to increased participation possibilities. While participatory performances are frequently praised for offering experiential freedom, this is in tension with the awareness that theatre exists within a managed framework. The research reported in this article demonstrates how an audience's awareness of structural constraints can be contemporaneous with pleasure taken in feelings of formlessness. It concludes by considering what it means when audiences talk about 'getting' a performance – in terms of understanding its potential, and appreciating its value – as well as what happens when they don't.

Keywords:

National Theatre Wales, audiences, mobility, site-specific, failure.

In the summer of 2010, I took part in a production by Wales' English-language national theatre company, the then brand-new National Theatre Wales. *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* was an excursion around a small Welsh seaside town inspired by local history, featuring amateur performers alongside professional artists. As a volunteer steward I helped guide audiences on foot through the ordinary spaces and spectacular landscape of Barmouth. Led down winding passageways and into nightclubs, up hills and between sand dunes, audience members were invited to discover vignettes of performance along the way. In a brief staged encounter, we came across a volunteer dressed as a Boer war veteran-turned-apple seller, a figure of local legend. With his wicker basket and pristine red uniform he watched as we crossed the road, then handed out apples – without explanation. Audiences took the offering, murmuring bemused gratitude, but afterwards I overheard people asking each other: 'what was that all about?' 'I didn't really want it, don't know what to do with it now'. 'I had to take it, I thought it would be rude!'

A springboard for my argument in this article is Sophie Nield's important question about the extent to which immersive productions are able to produce a more genuinely empowering experience for spectators than 'sitting quietly, alone in public, atomised with [one's] fellows in the dark?'¹ Nield described a small moment of crisis that took place during Goat and Monkey's *Reverence*, when a performer addressed Nield directly, prompting the following reflection:

I really was not sure what I was needed to do, by this actor, by this show. Not to act back, I was pretty sure, not to pretend [...]. Perhaps it was just to do exactly what I did – to not scream, resist, shout or walk away, but stay put, and smile, go along, play the game. To just be a little bit embarrassed, and let the actor do his job.²

Nield's thoughtful discussion pointed to growing suspicions about the claims made on behalf of participatory performance. This was further confronted in CTR's 2011 special issue on Tim Crouch's *The Author*, with Helen Freshwater surveying the gap 'between artistic aspirations to give audiences experiences of freedom, exploration and adventure, and the careful stage management of [...] the environment in which these explorations occur'.³ When the rules of an encounter are controlled by practitioners, with interactions delimited by (explicit or implicit) constraints, how liberated are audiences really from the supposed straitjacket of traditional theatre's behavioural norms?

Often, not very: participatory performances can seem 'as disappointing and mendacious, in their own way, as governmental consultation exercises which simply provide an illusion of public dialogue whilst functioning to legitimate decisions taken by the authorities'.⁴ Although the specific action possibilities available to participants may be left deliberately open, audiences frequently walk away aware of the limits of the encounter overall. In this manner, the potential for agency is sometimes palliated by the knowledge that the performance is a game to be played, whether or not the rules of that game are made clearly and immediately manifest for audiences.

Matthew Reason explains how too often theatre practitioners and scholars cultivate 'competing over-statements of idealised or imagined possibilities',⁵ romanticising immersive performances for their emancipatory potential without considering how participants themselves feel about these theatrical invitations. What is needed, Reason argues, is more research into the particular qualities of the experience as understood by actual audience members. How do different people feel about entering a theatrical encounter, when they know the rules or otherwise? How do they manage their experiences in the moment and reflect on them afterwards? And how do they bridge the gap Freshwater identifies between freedom to explore spaces, construct narratives, make meaning for themselves, and the knowledge that their ability to do these things is constrained within a managed framework?

This article considers how audience members responded to perceived tensions between freedom and constraint while participating in the located and promenade performances of National Theatre Wales (henceforth NTW). Drawing on the findings of an empirical research project conducted around the company's inaugural year, it explains how different people felt about the kinds of sovereignty they were offered during a number of performances, including *Shelf*

1. Sophie Nield, 'The Rise of the Character Named Spectator', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 18:4 (2008), 531–44, p.531.

2. Ibid.

3. Helen Freshwater, "'You Say Something'", *Contemporary Theatre Review* 21:4 (2011), 405–09, p.406.

4. Ibid.

5. Matthew Reason, 'Participations on Participation', *Participations* 12:1 (2015), 271–80, p.275.

Life (Swansea, February 2010), *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* (Barmouth, June/July 2010), *The Weather Factory* (Penygroes, December 2010), *Outdoors* (Aberystwyth, February 2011-12), and *The Passion* (Port Talbot, April 2011). While I have elsewhere investigated how audiences felt about the ways particular locations – with their distinct spaces, their stored-up histories – were performed during NTW's first year,⁶ I have not yet explored how NTW's promenade and immersive performances, with – for some audiences – their unfamiliar rules of engagement, were experienced in the moment and reflected on afterwards. Did participants feel they were invited to participate in open-ended explorations and become adventurers, physically exploring places through performance? Or, did structural limitations assert themselves? If so, how were these limitations experienced, and what broader understandings of the politics of reception might be drawn from audience accounts?

Participatory politics

While I want to avoid getting bogged down in taxonomies, it is worth briefly reflecting on the difficulty of assigning labels like 'participatory' or 'immersive' to NTW's work. Adam Alston offers a tentative definition of immersive theatre as that which 'may be distinguished by the sensory acts that it demands of audiences, such as touching and being touched, tasting, smelling and moving', while simultaneously enclosing them 'within an aesthetic space in which they are frequently, but not always, free to move'.⁷ By deploying these criteria it might be possible to rank NTW's productions on a scale of more-to-less immersive. However, as Reason argues, any attempt to evaluate intrinsic attributes against linear and hierarchic models is to unhelpfully elide the experiential qualities of each encounter.⁸ Immersion and participation cannot solely be considered the product of artistic intention; a critical shift is needed to consider these ideas as processes of *reception* as well.

Why is this important? Because as Freshwater's article details, a range of near-utopian claims have been made on behalf of participatory artworks and the kinds of 'pleasures and opportunities' they present.⁹ Here, as in her earlier *Theatre & Audience* (2009), Freshwater addresses attempts within theatre and performance studies to reductively interpret what are in fact multifaceted audience responses as positively affective, confronting the pervasive tendency to see theatrical participation as inextricably linked to participation in civic life.¹⁰ As Matthew Reason points out, the 'idealised claim made for such encounters is that they are democratising', their audiences 'variously politically good (empowered), ethically good (empathetic), creatively good (not reactionary), perhaps even good in terms of wellbeing (physically active)'.¹¹ However, both authors suggest that the claims of equality and democracy made on behalf of such artworks effectively serve to conceal the possibility of disavowals and exclusions. Empirical investigations of audience reception offer one way of mapping these complexities.

6. For an investigation of audiences' responses to the performance of location see Kirsty Sedgman: *Locating the Audience* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016). Using a quali-quantitative approach I gathered 558 post-show questionnaire responses and interviewed 40 people: from audience members to community volunteers to NTW's creative associates. Contained within the book is a detailed methodological discussion, alongside deeper discussion of two events in detail: *For Mountain, Sand & Sea*, and Mike Pearson's production of *The Persians* (Sennybridge Military Range, August 2010).

7. Adam Alston. 'Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value', *Performance Research* 18 (2013), 128-38, p.128.

8. Matthew Reason. 'Participations on Participation', *Participations* 12:1 (2015), 271-80.

9. Helen Freshwater. "'You Say Something'", *Contemporary Theatre Review* 21:4 (2011), 405-09, p.405.

10. Ibid. *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

11. Matthew Reason. 'Participations on Participation', *Participations* 12:1 (2015), 271-80, p.272.

While a full analysis of these debates is outside the scope of this article, it would be remiss to fail to reference how similar arguments have played out within the visual arts field. In her infamous rebuttal of Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), Claire Bishop suggests that participatory art discourses tend to erase rather than sustain awareness of relations of division and conflict that might exist amongst audiences.¹² In other words, Bourriaud's narrative of relationality – which posits aesthetic experiences as the conduit for social relations – celebrates the emancipatory potential of deliberately participatory art without considering the 'antagonisms' such works might evoke. This is problematic in at least two ways. Firstly, as Reason details, Bishop's argument reminds us that all artworks are always-already relational, and that Bourriaud's attempt to rope off a special genre of 'relationality' is based on a fundamental misreading of the poststructuralist writings on which his thesis rests.¹³ And secondly, while relational discourses deliberately resist the idea of an 'ideal response', the model of an ideal *spectator* that emerges from these accounts is relatively well formed. Thus, such works are often implicitly and problematically constructed for an imagined audience, one considered capable of thinking and acting relationally, and hence of responding in the 'right' kind of way. These ideas have been further addressed by Carl Lavery, who describes how collaborative performance company Lone Twin effectively resist hierarchizing different kinds of participatory activity: participation is instead considered 'constitutive of the aesthetic relationship *tout court*, and so not unique to participatory art practices as such'.¹⁴ By encouraging audiences to engage with performances in any way they choose, Lone Twin refigure their attenders as 'invited guests' who have the option of taking part in a 'relation of non-relation': in which the act of standing back, of choosing *not* to take part, is considered an active form of participation. Lavery's argument draws much of its impetus from Jacques Rancière's framework of the emancipated spectator, which calls for theatre studies to rethink its apprehension of performer/audience relations.¹⁵ Working from the groundwork laid by the authors cited here, I demonstrate how audiences made use of their own operative knowledges, activities, and engagements in their encounters with NTW productions. This requires me to consider the ways discourses of relation and participation shift when they are moved into the realm of located performance, in which audiences are brought into a relation with, and asked to participate within, a particular physical *space*.

Towards a new understanding of mobile performance

NTW launched in 2009 with the aim of creating theatre rooted in Wales with an international reach. As NTW's founding Artistic Director John E. McGrath explains, while the company resists applying the label 'site-specific' to their output, they 'tend to talk about [their] work as having a very deep relationship to its location'.¹⁶ This suggests that a particular kind of consideration should be applied when analysing the responses of their audiences, as NTW's productions often ask people through performance to locate themselves physically and

12. Claire Bishop. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' *October* 110 (2004), 51-79.

13. Matthew Reason. 'Participations on Participation', *Participations* 12:1 (2015), 271-80, p.274.

14. Carl Lavery & David Williams. 'Practising Participation: A Conversation with Lone Twin', *Performance Research* 16:4 (2011), 7-14, p.8.

15. Jacques Rancière. *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso Books, 2014).

16. Jasper Rees. '10 Questions for Artistic Director John McGrath', *ArtsDesk* (24 June 2014) Accessed 27 July 2015 [www.theartsdesk.com/print/73372].

affectively within the contours of place.¹⁷ It is therefore important to consider how NTW's practices fit into a new form of 'mobile' performance: one that, moreover,

goes further than the Scottish model in proposing an itinerant national theatre, concerned with moving identities, moving practices and moving sites. It is noteworthy that, in developing a contemporary version of a national theatre, NTW has focused on entangled ideas of site and mobility, indicating that to think these ideas together in the context of performance is a particularly current project.¹⁸

As Fiona Wilkie explains, the company fostered mobility through the overall design of their first year, with their 'Theatre Map of Wales' and 'Passport' scheme encouraging audiences to follow their journey from one performance to the next: from Cardiff to Barmouth, and from Prestatyn to Brecon to Bridgend. But NTW also frequently incorporated itinerant elements within individual productions themselves. For example, *Shelf Life* and *For Mountain Sand & Sea* were both promenade performances: *Shelf Life* guided audiences around the Old Library in Swansea, while *For Mountain, Sand & Sea* (henceforth *FMSAS*) took the form of a walking excursion. *Outdoors* was a tour of a mid-Wales town – Aberystwyth – but this time participants were asked to follow in the tracks of digital recordings made previously by thirteen local people. Conversely, in *The Weather Factory* audiences had no performers to guide them: brought to a mid-terrace in Penygroes in Snowdonia they were given twenty minutes to explore the house's meteorological eruptions. Rain in the cellar. Wind in the kitchen. Earthquakes in the pantry. And the inaugural year's finale, the giant undertaking *The Passion*, boasted a mix of scheduled and clandestine performative interventions directed by Michael Sheen in his hometown of Port Talbot. The production featured around a thousand local volunteers and was attended by a core audience of wrist-banded ticket holders, as well as many thousands more who were able to seek out numerous performances popping up around town.

Of these five productions, audiences were physically most constrained during *Shelf Life*, *FMSAS*, and *Outdoors*. In each of these cases, for the majority of the production the appropriate pathway through each location was clearly laid out. In all three shows audiences were expected to move at the pace of the event, guided between performed segments and unable to linger or explore at leisure. In *The Weather Factory* and *The Passion*, meanwhile, audiences were strongly encouraged to take on the role of adventurer, to shape their own route through the location and seek out action.

It might be argued that this latter kind of engagement is more 'relational' and therefore more democratic, offering participants a greater level of agency by giving audiences responsibility over their use of *location*. For example, in talking about the walking work of Wrights & Sites, Kris Darby describes how the company – inspired by the spatial story-making of the Situationist International group – developed a process called the 'drift', with participants invited to join an undirected 'playful-constructive' journey. Darby explains that 'those who drift with Wrights & Sites are physically aware of themselves as being "brought" to a site, which then heightens the exploratory impulse to find something for themselves "within it"'.¹⁹ This points to an important difference between being *brought into* a place and being *guided around* it. The latter model is potentially open for critique, presenting audiences with a fixed version of site and disaffording them the liberty to playfully construct it for themselves: as Wilkie explains, to

17. For more on how NTW's practices fit within contemporary discourses of site, space, place, and nation, see Kirsty Sedgman. *Locating the Audience* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016).

18. Fiona Wilkie. 'Site-Specific performance and the Mobility Turn', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 22 (2012): 203-12, p.212.

19. Kris Darby. 'Framing the Drift and Drifting the Frame', *New Theatre Quarterly* 29 (2013): 48-60, p.54.

map a set pathway through place is to risk simultaneously 'limit[ing] and channel[ing]' its complex spatial politics.²⁰ In other words, the less audiences' mobile possibilities are controlled, the greater their opportunity to produce (rather than consume) location might be.

It is revealing to tie the discussion of participation in the section above into Rosalyn Deutsche's work on public art, one of the inspirations for Bishop's 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' (2004). Deutsche demonstrates how the rhetoric of 'openness' and 'accessibility' that surrounds public space erases the exclusions that serve to structure such spaces.²¹ This gesture towards the exclusionary dynamics of space evokes Wilkie's argument that within located performance 'spatial rules *as experienced* by a user of the site are created out of the dialogue *between* rules' [original emphasis]. Here, site-specific performance can operate antagonistically – through challenging these structures and making visible their exclusionary underpinnings – as much as supportively, by working *with* and reinforcing these rules.²² Wilkie draws on Michel de Certeau's pedestrian tactics to further explain how places can be productively 'written on' through performance, allowing the writer to unearth and compile competing layers of meaning: a process of narrative aggregation. By this rationale, making 'choices' about individual mobility gives each audience member the participatory freedom to decide for herself how to rewrite a space. However, as Wilkie reminds us, this is a complex and deeply individualised process. In order to explore this provocation further, I turn to how audience members understood and navigated the choices on offer in NTW's first year of work, and investigate the strategies they adopted in order to so.

Responding to National Theatre Wales

Throughout NTW's inaugural year I ran an empirical research project that gathered and analysed audiences' responses to the first thirteen productions via a questionnaire and qualitative interviews. As other researchers have commented, despite a growing interest in spectatorship there is still a noticeable lack of engagement with and consideration of how actual audiences understand their theatrical encounters.²³ Even less is known about the ways people forge relationships with a single theatrical organisation: how they interpret the company's intentions, how they connect with or resist their working practices, and how their experiences of productions fit into or conflict with their own senses of self, their ideas of community, ownership, and belonging, their pre-existing relationship with theatre and the arts, and their understandings of place and nation. By working with NTW at the very beginning of their journey I hoped to get a sense of this process in action.

Of course, as McGrath points out, the findings of empirical studies are always necessarily partial, fragmented, and incomplete.²⁴ The questionnaire, in an effort to gather responses to all thirteen launch-year events, was available online. However, the majority of returns came from three case study productions – *FMSAS*, *The Persians*, and *Outdoors* – where I was physically present at

20. Fiona Wilkie. 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site-Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour', *New Theatre Quarterly*: 18:3 (2002): 243-260, p.244.

21. Rosalyn Deutsche. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

22. Fiona Wilkie. 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site-Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour', *New Theatre Quarterly*: 18:3 (2002): 243-260, p.248.

23. See for example Helen Freshwater. *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Jennifer Radbourne et al. *The Audience Experience* (Bristol: Intellect, 2013); Matthew Reason et al. 'Themed Section on Theatre Audiences', *Participations* 12:1 (2015), 117-22.

24. John E. McGrath. 'Foreword', in *Locating the Audience* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016).

performances and able to hand out and collect in completed paper versions. 558 responses were collected; the majority (488, or 87%) were gathered from either *The Persians* (211), *FMSAS* (196), or *Outdoors* (81), and the remainder from the other 10 productions. The intention of this article is not to present overarching generalisations about how audiences responded to NTW's productions, nor to offer a comprehensive impression of NTW's incredibly multifaceted inaugural year. On the contrary, what follows is largely based on analysis of qualitative data and anecdotal responses. Nonetheless, this article presents my first opportunity to read across reactions to a range of performances, and this has enabled me to critically address the argument that fewer restrictions on audience mobility lead to increased participation possibilities.

In terms of press coverage, the most high-profile project of NTW's launch year was its finale: Michael Sheen's gigantic *The Passion* in Port Talbot, which had been cited in over 400 news articles by the end of 2011. While reviews were generally enthusiastic, praising the production's ambition and scale as well as Sheen's ethical working relationship with his hometown and its community, a handful of critics expressed concerns about how the performance's 'openness' had impacted on the audience experience:

One obvious drawback to an undertaking like this, involving an amateur army of over a thousand volunteers, with brass bands, choirs and street-dancing youngsters, is that you don't get another walk around the block. When it's done, it's done – and to those, some old and infirm, who made the pilgrimage to designated parts of the town at appointed hours over the Easter weekend, only to find it hard to see, hear or make much sense of it all, one can only say: 'You weren't alone.' A bystander would have been forgiven for getting a touch bothered and bewildered.²⁵

This echoes research by Uwe Gröschel, who discovered that participants in promenade performances often 'take it as a given that they will be able to see and hear' and 'that there [will] be enough space for everybody – similar to a guaranteed seat in a theatre performance'.²⁶ As I explore below, it can take participants a little while to learn the rules of the encounter. While immersive mobile performances are by no means a new phenomenon, it is important to recognise that for a great many people 'theatre' is still largely synonymous with stage-centric scripted performance; thus, it is likely that a proportion of "'ordinary' audience members, with no professional stake in the theatre",²⁷ may still be reasonably unfamiliar with this kind of event. There was certainly evidence to this effect here: research conducted by Audiences Wales just prior to NTW's launch, which used market research methods to survey drama attendance trends in Wales, identified widespread resistance to 'experimental' work.²⁸ It is therefore necessary to consider the extent to which imagined codes of behaviour entrenched through 'traditional' theatrical norms might bleed for some audiences into their experiences of participatory events.

This was reflected in a handful of particularly rich responses uncovered in my research. In order to investigate these it is helpful to begin by detailing ambivalent responses to *The Passion*: a three-day experience which represented a substantial

25. Dominic Cavendish. 'Shelf Life at the Old Library Swansea, Review' (13 April 2010) Accessed 27 July 2015 [http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/dominic-cavendish/7585883/Shelf-Life-at-the-Old-Library-Swansea-review.html].

26. Uwe Gröschel. 'Researching Audiences Through Walking Fieldwork', *Participations* 12:1 (2015): 349–67, p.357.

27. Helen Freshwater. *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): 4.

28. Audiences Wales. 'Identifying the Potential: The Development of Theatre Audiences in Wales. Part Two' (2009). Accessed 15 May 2011 [http://www.audienceswales.co.uk/client_files//default/identifying_the_potential_part_two.pdf].

investment of time and energy, from the journey to reach Port Talbot to the long days spent traversing its spaces on foot. One respondent called it: 'A hugely ambitious, innovative and therefore risky project trying to encompass the whole town and a wider population over three days' [455].²⁹ For this attendee – as for the reviewer above – the 'risk' in the encounter was a product of its scale: 'The audience numbers grew over the weekend to something like 13,000 by the climax of the event, by all accounts' [455]. As a 'community project' *The Passion* was considered overall to be 'an astonishing success', involving a great many local people as performers; however, the event's size was felt by some to preclude absolute realisation of its communal potential, with locals 'often [going through] a great deal of preparatory work for very little [or] sometimes no exposure/performance opportunity' [455]. This was a theme evident in other responses from audiences, with another respondent experiencing

very mixed feelings about this event. There were some fantastic moments and the delight of the local community was evident. But the experience for me – and the people I took with me – was bitty, disorganised and ultimately very thin in terms of the performance we actually saw. We were there for over 8 hours on the Sunday and I'd say we saw about an hour and a half of performance. [482]

This indicates a certain friction between the spontaneous richness of the experience *in potentia* – a sense that Port Talbot was bursting at the seams with possibilities, with performers seemingly around every next corner – and the parallel reality of taking part in an event that largely required a deliberately unmanaged passage between components. Many people gleefully embraced the opportunities for impulsiveness offered by *The Passion*, delighting in how its unstructured approach made them feel part of a communal whole in which everyone roamed around together looking for action: 'The best event I have ever attended. Being able to be so close to the action as it happened and feeling so involved in it' [481]; 'It was such a brilliant weekend. Everyone joined together on those 3 days and the emotions I felt were incredible and shocked me a little' [483]. Others, like respondent 482 quoted above, felt that the 'thinness' of the actual experience offset the richness of the event-as-possibility. In considering NTW, this respondent concluded:

Living in London I don't feel I have much investment in [Wales] these days but from what I hear [NTW's] programme and its ambitions are spot on. Shame this one was not the piece I was hoping for. (I'm sure I'd have liked it a lot more if I didn't have my 78 year old mother along and been able to roam around looking for the action...). [482]

This comment finds echoes in responses to the work of international immersive behemoth Punchdrunk, whose meticulously detailed large-scale productions invite masked audience members into a space at staggered intervals and encourage them to explore: to open doors, peek behind curtains, run up and down stairs, fiddle with intricate props, engage in intimate one-on-one encounters, and seek out snatches of narrative based on classic playtexts. While fans frequently articulate feelings of childlike joy in discovery,³⁰ others have considered how too much freedom can in its own way be experientially restrictive. Jan Wozniak demonstrates that some audience members feel forced into adopting competitive and individualistic behaviour in order to secure the

29. Numbers in square brackets refer to unique respondent reference IDs. This project was carried out with full adherence to the ethics policy of the University of Aberystwyth.

30. Rose Biggin. 'Reading Fan Mail', *Participations* 12:1 (2015), 301–17.

highest-value experience possible,³¹ while Susannah Clapp suggests audiences have become shrewder in their Punchdrunk encounters, adroit at working the system to their advantage. Clapp terms these people ‘aficionados’, whereas Adam Alston prefers the adjective ‘savvy’. Both point to a heuristic division, with those audience members ready to anticipate and exploit proffered opportunities better prepared to ‘get ahead of the game’, while people less able or willing to engage in this kind of ‘entrepreneurial participation’ fall behind.³² Alston reports speaking with fellow participants after *Masque of the Red Death* who claimed ‘to have seen next to nothing of the more intimate elements of the performance, always at one step removed from the action’.³³ At a Punchdrunk show, the company’s founder and Artistic Director Felix Barrett proudly asserts, ‘[the audience is] in charge’: responsible for forging their own pathway through the experience, they ‘float down corridors and choose which characters they want to have close-ups with, where they want spectacle’.³⁴ In practice, however, what my own research reveals is that, rather than providing a more democratic kind of experience, such productions are sometimes seen to problematically reward atomization, self-interest, and privilege. As John Urry’s concept of ‘network capital’ proposes, variances in motility serve to perpetuate socio-economic inequalities.³⁵ The parenthesis in the respondent quotation above is particularly interesting because it suggests that participatory events risk privileging able-bodied individuals in possession of the speed, shrewdness, and skill necessary to successfully hunt down spectacle. Those with increased ‘motility capital’³⁶ are able to capitalise on the value of such experiences, while others inevitably lose out. In addition, as Wozniak, Alston, and Clapp suggest, to take part in these performances is also to engage in a process of learning and exploiting the rules of the game. While there are signs that the respondent quoted above is well-versed in theatre (signaled especially through the value judgment of NTW’s programme as ‘spot on’ [482]), the needs of their companion held them back.

For a successful experience, it is therefore necessary for audiences firstly to know *what they are supposed to be doing* as part of a theatrical encounter, and secondly to feel they are *capable* of taking up that role. These are often the people who are figured by artists and researchers as ideal audience members in possession of a receptive kind of subjectivity, while those with different forms of motility capital and cultural experience risk being excluded, their divergent engagements concealed from view. In the following section I take these ideas further, asking what it means for audiences to feel they have ‘got’ a performance, and what happens when they don’t.

‘Getting’ it

An intriguing example of audience resistance comes from *Shelf Life*, described by a reviewer as

a fragmented elegy for libraries. A piece of immersion [*sic*] theatre set in Swansea’s old library, it features the Welsh National Opera, a setting that’s

31. Jan Wozniak. ‘The Value of Being Together?’, *Participations* 12:1 (2015), 318–32.

32. Adam Alston. ‘Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value’, *Performance Research* 18:2 (2013), 128–38, p.128.

33. Ibid.

34. Guy Kelly. ‘Punchdrunk visionary Felix Barrett’, *Telegraph* (19 June 2015) Accessed 27 July 2015 [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturenews/11675468/Punchdrunks-Felix-Barrett-If-audiences-get-used-to-the-rules-change-them.html].

35. John Urry. *Mobilities*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

36. Ibid.

somewhere between a Greek Deipnosophistae banquet and the Mad Hatter's Tea Party, a piece of interpretive dance, and a frame of literary reference so vast it stretches from Homer to Spike Milligan. Almost everything about this tribute to the power of the printed word screams highbrow.³⁷

Shelf Life was depicted by one of my respondents as taking place

[i]n a beautiful setting and with some lovely visual images but I didn't understand it at all. It had no linear follow through and I'd convinced a non regular theatre goer to go with me who was very put off by not understanding what was going on. Had ingredients to make it a big success but didn't quite achieve it. [34]

What I found especially interesting about this questionnaire excerpt was the way the participant separated her own lack of understanding from that of her companion. While the person with whom she attended was not a regular theatregoer, respondent 34 specifically oriented herself as a theatre-lover. Nonetheless, both found themselves similarly unable to understand the production because, despite its physical linearity (in which audiences were guided around the space), it was *conceptually* non-linear. The real problem was not that respondent 34 hadn't enjoyed it herself but that she had actively persuaded her companion to attend, possibly encountering a certain level of opposition. To some extent, then, she had 'vouched for' the event to her attendant, and had therefore taken on a kind of responsibility for the success or otherwise of their experience. There is a kind of finality to the phrase '[they were] very put off' that hints at a deeper problem: the risk that an already-hesitant person convinced into taking part in something they find inaccessible or uncomfortable will have their resistance confirmed.

This response further suggests that, for audiences, being 'guided into' or 'guided through' a performance works on a number of different levels. This idea can be investigated through considering additional responses, this time to *The Weather Factory*, in which NTW and their partner organisation Fevered Sleep took over a dingy mid-terrace house in Snowdonia and filled it with meteorological effects and artifacts, creating a sort of museum of weather:

The performance did not seem to have any purpose, the effects were interesting from a technical standpoint but an explanation of something like the glasses with slate on them would have linked them in with the show. It just seemed like a bunch of cool things were there - the glasses were something, all the pictures were something - trying to tell a story or make a point but there was nothing to guide you through that story. Disparate. [433]

This response contains an interesting discursive feature that I found echoed throughout the research as a whole - the struggle to 'get the point' of a theatre piece:

It's all [very] well being worthy but if there is no story... then what's the point? [470]

There were many special images and aspects; one or two were average and [I] didn't get the point. [148]

37. Ben Bryant. 'Shelf Life Theatre Review', *BuzzMag* (16 April 2010) [www.buzzmag.co.uk/uncategorized/shelf-life-theatre-review, Accessed 27 July 2015].

There is a tendency to interpret this as a desire to understand the 'meaning' of an artwork. Audience members who we see as insisting on readily-consumable meaning are often dismissed as 'cultural shoppers', to paraphrase Alison Oddey and Christina White. On entering Doris Salgado's *Shibboleth* installation at the Tate Modern – a large crack in the concrete floor of the Turbine Hall – and being handed an explanatory leaflet, Oddey and White explain that

the instant decision for the spectator is whether to glance, look or read [...]. The spectator will have a choice to read the text or read the work; the spectator [*sic*] choice is for personal interpretation and discovery or discovery within the critic or presenter's context: a choice to go into an imaginary world, which is created from the concrete crack itself of what the crack means, personally, culturally and socially and the time you are willing to give to spectating in the context of what your purpose was in going to visit the artwork [*sic*]. Cultural shopping, and a fleeting look, may reduce one's understanding of cultural context and artistic value.³⁸

Oddey and White's commentary can usefully be mapped onto Lyotard's distinction between a *semiotic* reading and what he calls 'dissemiotics'. The first is often dismissed as a fleeting look from a cultural shopper, who seeks merely to identify and catalogue signs before moving on: a one-way, top-down process in which meaning is passed linearly from critic/presenter to spectator. Conversely, dissemiotics is positioned as a heuristic model that resists cultural shopping: it goes 'beyond Saussurean binarism and the "closure of representation"' by replacing the 'theater of signs' with a 'theater of energies'.³⁹ These energies cannot be simply purchased and consumed; they must be produced slowly and personally by audience members themselves.

It is tempting to dismiss audience members who talk about entering a deliberately open work looking for a 'point' that they can 'get' as failing to respond in the right way.⁴⁰ However, when audience members talk about wanting to 'get the point' of a performance, this does not necessarily mean they have conceptually limited the function and purpose of their encounter to purchasing experiences and consuming fixed meanings. This can be evidenced particularly powerfully by drawing out the full response from one of the respondents quoted above:

There were many special images and aspects; one or two were average and [I] didn't get the point. *But the moment in the Sandancer = elderly lady and young soldier dancing was so poignant and will stay with me for a long time.* [emphasis added] [148]

This respondent refers back to *FMSAS*, the three-hour guided tour throughout Barmouth. The act under discussion is the Sandancer scene, remembered by many people as an especially resonant moment, which took place in the town's only nightclub. Stained black walls, stale smell, sticky floors; musky gloom, the bright afternoon left outside. The scene featured a young, professional male dancer dressed in a WWII soldier's uniform moving frenetically to drum 'n' bass. This faded first into the sound of gunfire and then into the soft melody of a wartime waltz, as an elderly local woman joined the soldier on the dance floor. For the respondent quoted above, as for many others, this scene was successful because of its 'poignancy' – its visceral affect in the moment, as well as its mnemonic

38. Alison Oddey & Christina White. *Modes of Spectating* (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), p.12.

39. Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p.16.

40. See for example Adam Alston positioning immersive performance within a consumer-driven push to manufacture theatrical events, with narcissistic audiences determined to acquire and stockpile experiences: 'Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value', *Performance Research* 18 (2013), 128-38, p.128.

reverberations afterwards – rather than because the performance’s signs had been successfully decoded. They had got the point of this experience because they felt able to grasp what they were *supposed to do with it*, as well as what that scene could *do for them*:

You made me laugh, and you really made me cry in the Sand Dancer [*sic*]. [141]

Deeply Moving in the Nightclub. [210]

[It] was just an extraordinary force of performance on so many different levels. [...]. Through the physical power of the performer and [...] the commentary that it was offering on the past [...], and then that amazingly nostalgic moment when the elderly usherette walked onstage, which did I think draw a collective intake of breath from everybody. [21, interview]

Here the choice is not, as Oddey and White suggest, limited to reading the text or reading the work: it is not simply a case of either/or. For certain audience members, to feel that they have ‘got’ a performance comes as a direct result of knowing how they are supposed to orient themselves in relation to it, allowing their minds and bodies to be appropriately open to the performance’s specific energies. In fact, as I detail elsewhere,⁴¹ a number of my respondents expressed a wish to be given further information before *FMSAS*: ‘I need to have some understanding prior/during the event/topic to gain the value and knowledge of the experience’ [229]. Far from reducing its value, ‘reading the text’ can allow audience members less familiar with certain kinds of experience to open themselves up to performative possibilities and thereby *deepen* their personal engagements with the work.

It is useful here to consider Jill Dolan’s description of the ‘receptive’ audience member, ‘attuned to the vocabulary of the theatrical moment and attentive to the responses of its fellows’.⁴² As Dolan points out, it is the ‘ongoing’ audience – those people who regularly take part in similar events – who are most likely to be receptive. Dolan draws on Bourdieu’s cultural capital model, which explains how only those people in possession of the relevant codes are able to unlock (‘decode’) the value of works of art: ‘A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason’.⁴³ Receptive audiences are those who understand the cultural codes that enable them to access the experience, their bodies and minds adjusting automatically to the artwork’s particular frame of reference. Whether they ultimately adore, disparage, resist, or succumb to the experience, participants with greater levels of cultural familiarity are able to respond from a position of advantage: from a place *inside* that framework.

But what of the audience member who skirts around its edges, unable to identify an entry point? It is when there is no easily discernible way into an experience that such participants might struggle to orient themselves. And while I absolutely wish to avoid recommending that theatre practitioners lay out the precise rules of each specific encounter beforehand, it is telling that a number of my respondents articulated the need to understand *what they might have to do in order to work these rules out*. The following quotation offers a useful insight into how practically this might be achieved:

41. Kirsty Sedgman: *Locating the Audience* (Bristol: Intellect, 2016), p.81.

42. Jill Dolan. *Utopia in Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p.26.

43. Pierre Bourdieu. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.2.

[In *The Weather Factory*] [t]he cross over of installation art and theatre has been executed well and the freedom given does not impact upon the narrative, and vice versa. The mince pie and drink are a nice touch as an ice breaker, which alleviated fears of embarrassment and non-interaction with the space. [435]

For this audience member, the glass of sherry and snack laid out at the beginning of *The Weather Factory*, along with the note encouraging visitors to consume and explore, helped them to break through the constraints of anticipated behaviour and begin to interact with the space. Through devices like these – what the respondent above evocatively terms ‘ice breakers’ – audience members can be eased more gently into an encounter rather than set adrift within it and expected to instantly find their feet.

The difficulty, of course, lies in appealing both to ongoing audiences and new. As what follows will show, there are signs that when the ice breaker is too overt, the entry route too signposted, the opportunity for already-receptive participants to physically and imaginatively locate themselves in performance is reduced: they feel ‘pre-located’, as it were. Furthermore, to follow the logic of site-specific theatre, this risks producing a version of place-as-spectacle, with location becoming a commodity to be docilely consumed.

Savvy audiences

Here it is worth briefly considering *Outdoors*, which attracted a higher number of critical responses than other productions in NTW’s inaugural year. On average, across NTW’s entire launch year, 63% of all audience members rated the performance they had seen Excellent, 27% Good, and 7% Average. For *Outdoors*, however, 32% rated the event Excellent, 52% Good, and 14% Average.

<INSERT FIGURE 1>

Fig. 1: Comparing audience ratings for *Outdoors* with average ratings for twelve other launch-year productions.

Outdoors took place in Aberystwyth, a town with a total population of around 20,000, approximately 40% of which is connected to the university as students or staff. It is therefore likely that *Outdoors* attracted a larger proportion of people attending specifically due to a scholarly interest in theatre, as confirmed by the explanations of motivation in over a third of questionnaire returns:

It was recommended by my tutors as a good example of participation, which we needed to do a portfolio on that module. [457]

Heard about Rimini Protokoll and interested to see their engagement with Aberystwyth (especially as a cultural geographer). [500]

Outdoors’ participants were mostly ‘savvy’, exhibiting prior knowledge of site-specific and participatory theatre. These respondents tended to agree that *Outdoors* was an interesting idea, with particular praise offered for Rimini Protokoll’s innovative use of digital technology. The guides were members of Aberystwyth’s Heartsong community choir; prior to the performance, volunteers like myself spent time walking around Aberystwyth with the local singers, encouraging them to share with us their memories of different locations in town. These journeys were then plotted in the production room, partially scripted, and finally captured on iPods, incorporating planned moments in which guides would meet and perform an action, such as exchanging a kiss, or spy on each other

further down the street. Audience members followed the recorded trace of their guide's footsteps and crossed paths with fellow participants where routes intersected. There were two specific points when all journeys would 'break', with participants passed from one guide to another. It was therefore crucial that all thirteen takes be recorded simultaneously, and the journey culminated in simultaneous congregation at the live choir's weekly rehearsal.

While most people praised the format for its 'clever' conceit, many thought the execution could have been better managed. In her review, Lyn Gardner called the interweaving of personal narratives 'fascinating', but bookended the compliment with the suggestion that

there are flaws in this set-up that make it a frustrating experience – one that is limited, rather than liberated, by the technology. The stories aren't revealing enough, and all the multitasking means you don't notice your surroundings as much as you might if you just wandered without the iPod.⁴⁴

A number of respondents echoed this critique, saying they felt 'trapped' by the fixity of the schedule, which led them 'round and round the houses' [541], or calling the show 'excellent as regards idea and novelty', but confiding that they '[b]egan to feel a bit controlled by end – hence [why I didn't give an] excellent rating' [509]. Here, the guided tour format caused some frustration, with the ability of participants to get to know Aberystwyth on a deeper level problematically curtailed.

The same thing could be found in some of the reactions to *FMSAS*. Responses to this production correlated almost exactly with the launch year's average and were therefore much more positive overall than for *Outdoors*, with 64% rating the performance Excellent, 28% Good, and 7% Average. After convening at the local village hall, the group of 50 audience members was split in half. Each section was led on a guided 'excursion' of Barmouth, with the Fern group walking up the steep hill at the back of town and then down to the beach, and the Candyfloss group proceeding down to the beach first and then up the hill. Midway through the three-hour journey the groups reconvened, walking together for the remainder of the event.

<INSERT FIGURE 2>

Fig. 2: Map of route taken by Fern group through Barmouth during For Mountain, Sand & Sea. Image adapted from data on OpenStreetMap, available under Open Data Commons Open Database licence (opendatacommons.org). Cartography licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 2.0 licence (www.openstreetmap.org/copyright).

FMSAS was 'curated' by influential Welsh artist Marc Rees. He and his team of international performers staged dramatic 'interventions' in different spaces around town, with audiences invited to feel as if they had stumbled across these performative vignettes. For almost two-thirds of all participants, this format proved an unqualified success. One of my interviewees explained that

[t]here was a kind of fairytale quality about [the experience], coming across people in unusual places, and you didn't know what you were going to experience round the next corner. And I think with a number of the performances of NTW's that I've seen there has been this blurring of boundaries between what is theatre and what is actually happening. You don't have a set theatre wall. [...] You were going around and you weren't quite sure who was in the performance and who wasn't. [117]

44. Lyn Gardner. 'Outdoors – Review', *Guardian* (11 March 2011) Accessed 27 July 2015 [www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/mar/11/outdoors-review].

For this respondent, as for many others, it was the joy of not-knowing, never quite being able to ascertain whether people on the street were part of the event, that prompted her Excellent rating. This resulted in unplanned elements being briefly assimilated within the performance: for example, when the Fern group were walking along the hill path one day they were forced to move out of the way while a tractor passed. Overheard snippets of conversation suggested that this stimulated a frisson of excitement, as some wondered if the driver might be involved in the show. In the words of one conversant, it's 'nice to have that sense of discovery'.

Importantly, it seemed that for many people, their awareness of *FMSAS* as a product of work – of careful structuring by the creative team – could smoothly be reconciled with pleasurable feelings of *unstructuredness*. The serendipitous quality of the encounter was therefore a recurring reason for rating the production positively. Another interviewee explained that he hadn't booked the tickets himself: '[A friend] found out about it and rang up and got details and *that's how we found ourselves there*' [emphasis added] [23]. In our lengthy conversation he described how, throughout the performance, he had enjoyed the sensation that NTW were in control of the event, yet that he and his group had still felt able to 'make our own minds up' about what was happening [23]. This respondent took pleasure in the opportunity to playfully construct a version of Barmouth for himself, mapping the town freely in his imagination if not through his feet. In this way, he was able to balance the knowledge that the practitioners *were* in charge with the enjoyable sensation that they *weren't*.

However, others felt frustrated by the feeling that their experience had been overly stage-managed, with the extent of their movements controlled by the limits of the production. As with *Outdoors*, there were signs that these participants tended to bring with them considerable professional and/or scholarly experience of site-specific theatre: they were much more likely than others, for instance, to give 'academic' or 'critical' interest as a primary reason for attendance. An especially vivid questionnaire response, inspiring the title of this article, was submitted by a participant who explained that '[m]y biggest interest (within theatre) is in projects that take performances out of the traditional theatre building – site specific, promenade, etc' [22]. Referring to a scene in the local Sailor's Institute, where on entry audiences were wordlessly handed fake plastic beards, she said:

I can see where they were trying to come from, being inventive and trying something different, but it was done extremely poorly – too much of a guided tour. 'Ladies and Gentlemen now please follow me, please put on your beards'. Became very cheesy and corny. [22]

In my role as steward of the Fern group, I observed (and frequently bore the brunt of) this impatience with the event's rules. Academics were almost always the ones who made 'baaa-ing' sounds, for instance, when being ushered down a narrow path, or rolled their eyes when asked to use the pedestrian crossing. 'We do this every day,' I overheard. 'Do they think when we become audiences we lose our ability to cross the road?'

This is actually a very good question, and brings into view an important tension – especially acute within located theatre – between pragmatics and aesthetics.⁴⁵ The issue, of course, is one of risk management. The problem is that

45. Take for example one of the biggest causes for complaint during *FMSAS*: the high-viz waistcoats that stewards and audience members were required to wear. I particularly remember a lengthy conversation I had

by removing the possibilities for risk, practitioners are forced to balance another kind of hazard: the possibility of stifling the ability of audiences to take pleasure in genuine unpredictability. One lovely final example came during a performance on a particularly windy day, when the usual beach scene – in which audiences were asked to pick up inflatable lilos and perform a kind of slow, pirouetting salute – had to be truncated, due to the weather. One audience member with professional involvement in the arts was heard lamenting the loss of this element, about which he had previously been told. ‘Us struggling with [the lilos] against the wind, it could have been really funny. It’s a shame [the stewards] worried so hard about it’. It is possible that, for this attendee, the lost sense of jeopardy was perhaps recaptured later on through his own small, deliberate infraction, furtively disappearing across the road to ‘grab a bite from the greasy café’: ‘I’m going to break the rules, be naughty’.

Regarding risk: A conclusion

In considering her own experience of heritage sites, Wilkie details how spaces naturally assert their own sets of rules that structure how people make use of them.⁴⁶ A useful description for this process is provided by the term ‘affordances’. Coined by geographer James J. Gibson, the term was originally used to explain the ways environments offer expanded possibilities for action. It has more recently been adopted by a number of performance theorists⁴⁷ to contemplate how, by overlaying contrary frameworks and presenting *disruptive* affordances, located performances can seek to highlight the possibilities for action in space. Pearson argues that such acts of problematisation can be productive in addressing spatial politics. By affording the potential for locational relationality, performances may invite their audiences to enter into a personal course of *discovery*, constructing their own version of location by forging imaginative connections.⁴⁸ To put it differently, this is a process of getting one’s own bearings within a site – and its sedimentary layers of history, memory, narrative – rather than being told where to stand. One of the aims of this article was to consider what happens when practitioners seek to structure the audience experience, and how these strategies of freedom and control are balanced and received. As the above suggests, the discourses of located performance propose that when practitioners impose overly-opaque structures in their management of audience relations with site, this can lead to a more ‘permanent reclamation’ of that place, rather than superficial and fleeting acts of composition.⁴⁹

This play between freedom and control reverberates through much contemporary performance, with certain companies increasingly ready ‘to hand over responsibility to their audiences’: offering them ‘real choices’, the chance to make ‘meaningful contributions’.⁵⁰ For example, practitioners such as Tim Crouch see uncertainty as inherently democratizing: ‘bereft of the comfort of traditional guidance’, he says, ‘[w]e are all in this together. We are all brought to the table and we all have to decide when to get down’. This contrasts with the traditional performance contract, in which it is understood that

with a couple who argued bitterly against having to put them on. After explaining that they were an insurance requirement, I was asked: ‘how will wearing one of these stop me falling down the hill?’

46. Fiona Wilkie. ‘Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site-Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour’, *New Theatre Quarterly*: 18:3 (2002): 243-260.

47. See e.g. Baz Kershaw, *Theatre Ecology: Environments and Performance Events* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

48. Mike Pearson. ‘Haunted House: Staging *The Persians* with the British Army’, in Joanne Tompkins & Anna Birch (Eds.), *Performing Site-Specific Theatre: Politics, Place, Practice* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 69–83, p.83.

49. Ibid.

50. Helen Freshwater. *Theatre & Audience* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p.72.

we will be informed just enough of the nature of the exchange in advance of the exchange. We will understand that the exchange will be contained within a form and that the form is a kind of a game; a game that is safe and that may even be entertaining; a game that will have certainly taken our beliefs and feelings into account. We will understand that some participants in the exchange will be more in control of the form than others. We understand that and are happy to confer an authority on those 'owners of the form' in the knowledge that their ownership will last only as long as the game lasts.⁵¹

Eschewing the safe haven of the recognizable game, Crouch's performances perhaps offer instead what Karoline Gritzner calls 'limit experiences'. These are 'risky' events that take us 'to the limits of what is bearable': experiences in which it is eminently possible 'that the relational art event does not materialize', where 'the outcome is not clear, nothing might occur, expectations could be ruined'.⁵²

Clearly, the themes of sexualized bullying and child abuse in the Crouch works referred to here are at odds with the subject of the performances discussed in my article. However, their experimentation with audience relations bear comparison, and my investigation of these relations in NTW productions strongly suggest that the claims of democracy made on behalf of such theatrical events require further interrogation. Echoing Wilkie's investigation of site-specific performance, my research shows that deliberately 'open' artworks risk creating a divide between different sets of people: 'a divide separating those who are "in the know" from those who are not'.⁵³ In fact, there are indications that it is *ongoing* theatregoers who are most likely to recognise performative borders as they come up against them: to hunger for freedom, and to push at the limits of authority and form. Meanwhile, less 'savvy' audience members can find that the lack of clear guidance hampers their chances for meaningful participation. Mobile events especially risk privileging those with the necessary forms of capital – cultural, motility, certain kinds of experience and knowledge, and so on – as better able firstly to play the game, and secondly to make sense of the experience afterwards. As this research has shown, some find it more difficult than others to identify, navigate, and exploit performances' hazy rules. Here I have discovered how eager audience members often are to defer to practitioners' professional expertise: by willingly buying into the *illusion* of control they know that they are more likely to receive a satisfying performance. For many participants, there is therefore an acknowledged trade-off in operation, with the price of freedom being the possibility that the performance might fall apart in indecipherable ways. For such people, when outcomes are unclear the experience is analogous to the mysterious apple in *For Mountain, Sand, & Sea*. 'What's that all about? I don't know what to do with it now'.

As well as recognizing what is lost when practitioners retain control, it is therefore important also to recognise what is *gained*. This is the alleviation, for participants with less experience of the kind of theatrical engagement on offer, of anxiety about a performance: a fear of having to fight to keep up, to struggle to orient themselves and get their bearings. Otherwise what risks remaining after such experiences is a retinue of unfulfilled expectations, lingering unease – and perhaps even the worry that it is the audience, and not the performance, that failed.

51. Tim Crouch. 'The Author: Response and Responsibility', *Contemporary Theatre Review* 21:4 (2011): 416-422.

52. Karoline Gritzner. 'Form and Formlessness', *Performance Research* 16:4 (2011), 109-16, p.110.

53. Fiona Wilkie. 'Kinds of Place at Bore Place: Site-Specific Performance and the Rules of Spatial Behaviour', *New Theatre Quarterly* 18:3 (2002): 243-260.